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## THE INDIVIDUAL'S RESPONSIBILITY TO HIS PROFESSION\*

By HAROLD H. EMMONS, *President, Detroit Board of Commerce*

## SUMMARY. FIFTH GENERAL SESSION

In former times the mental leadership of mankind has been vested in those who by inheritance or personal effort have acquired the education and mental capacity which give the ability both to think clearly and to induce others to follow. Such men naturally gravitated into the ranks of the so-called learned professions—the minister, the lawyer, the doctor, to which is properly added the teacher. It is doubtless within the memory of nearly all those present, that these men were the leaders of thought in their various communities. Unfortunately, in the present day the effectiveness of these men has largely diminished.

Where all of these agencies reach thousands, hundreds of thousands and millions are waiting. They are the retailers—where are the wholesalers? The public library and the librarian must assume and carry this burden. The librarian must reach out and insistently press upon the people the richness of information which is within his keeping. His occupation has now become a profession, in the true practice of which he will exercise a more profound and widespread power for good than can any member of any other profession or business. His opportunity is limitless; it has been created by the progress of humanity, and by the new and pressing obligations created thereby.

Membership in any profession is in itself a distinction. It places its recipient in the class of those who first prepare themselves by securing mastery over some needed and useful department of life, and then give to its practice their complete and devoted service. Its essential element is its idealism. Its ideal is service, helpful, unselfish, and without thought of commercial gain. It cannot live and fructify in a mercenary soul.

Therefore, addressing professional men and women who have, I am sure, this conception of their destiny, I wish to emphasize

these rules which we should ever have in mind:

I. We must be loyal to our profession. Half-hearted allegiance will not do. We have consecrated ourselves to the work. It demands the very best that is in us.

This loyalty requires of us many things. We must support each other. No results of lasting benefit can be attained by any one of us alone. The effective practice of any profession is possible only from the assimilation and use of the contributions of all of our associates. The goal of any profession is the composite wisdom and learning of all its members.

We must make the individual work of each of us pay a return, plus interest, to our profession, for its investment in us. The opportunity for each of us to attain membership has come from the combined results of the earnest, toilsome and conscientious work of our innumerable predecessors. Were it not for the schools and libraries which they have provided, were it not for the work and service which they have toilsomely performed, were it not for the store of knowledge which they have discovered and recorded, we would not be afforded our present opportunity. This priceless heritage demands that we not only use it to the advantage of ourselves and of others, but also that we add to it for the benefit of our profession and of its future members. We must not be drones in the hive.

II. We must be loyal to the ideals of our profession.

Among these perhaps the most important are character, proficiency and service. No true professional life is possible without them. A man without character can exercise no influence for good. Lack of character cannot be concealed. The professional man or woman must endure the searching light of publicity, and if this reveals wrong purposes or methods, he or she is unfit for membership.

Service to our fellow beings is the object

\*Given, in Mr. Emmons' absence, by Dr. J. B. Kennedy, director, Detroit Board of Commerce, and member, Detroit Library Commission.

of a true professional man's life. If he does not carry with him the spirit of helpful service, he has no right to call himself a professional man.

So vital is this matter of our professional virtue or honor that at stated periods we should examine ourselves as to our attitude of mind. Are we sincerely desirous of being broadly helpful, or are we just going through the required formulæ? Do we recognize the obligations of service to humanity which are peculiarly ours because of our special training? The professional man ceases to exist as a professional man the moment he comes to regard his work as merely a means to a livelihood. In like measure he must avoid becoming narrow in his vision, and activity. The tendency in all lines is now to specialize, and the temptation to the professional man is to shut himself up in one interest, to one branch of his own profession, leaving outside all interest in other branches and in affairs of the world at large. He places unprofessional limits upon himself.

A professional man should seek opportunities for service outside his own line. He should keep abreast of the times. He should get an international mind and an international vision. He should of course become active in the affairs of his own profession, but he should take part in the broader programs for human betterment.

Above all we must shun selfishness. The test of any man or movement is: What does it contribute to the common good? Every professional man is the servant of all. The modern spirit is asking for a more practical working of the old idealism, and the condition of primacy is the capacity for service.

By all means we must avoid the habit of criticizing others. Remember that we are leaders, and no leader ever succeeded by the use of complaints. Neither has anyone ever yet succeeded in anything by trying to tear someone else down. One of the best mottoes I have ever seen hangs on the wall of a friend's office,—“You cannot expect a dog to perform its best tricks when someone is standing on its tail.”

In short we can do no better than to adopt the adage of William Penn, the first librarian of this country:

I expect to pass through this life but once. If there is any kindness or any good that I can do to my fellow beings, let me do it now. I shall pass this way but once.

There is upon us an obligation because we profess skill in our varied lines. What we have is only a trust. Wealth is under obligation to poverty. Knowledge has a service obligation to ignorance. Strength is under obligation to weakness and before God we are responsible for our use of our abilities.

## THE LIBRARIAN'S DUTY TO HIS PROFESSION

By C. B. RODEN, *Librarian, Chicago Public Library*

### FIFTH GENERAL SESSION

We speak of our calling as a profession, and even as we speak we mentally align ourselves with those ancient and honorable professions that minister to the great and fundamental needs of mankind, the needs of the soul, the body, and, most prized of man's possessions, his rights and liberties.

Religion, Medicine, Law—these three—and when we add a fourth, Education, ministering to the needs of the mind, we do not thereby alter nor diminish the dignity and excellence of that glorious company to the circle of whose fellowship we claim admittance.

Yet we have no body of doctrine running back to a time “whereof the memory of man

runneth not to the contrary.” We have no treasury of accumulated lore derived from the ancient folkways. We have no divine revelation upon which to base our claims to a ministry.

We have only a faith, not yet shared by all of our generation, which I have heard questioned even by one of our own most distinguished colleagues, that we are doing useful work, and on the basis of that belief we profess and call ourselves a profession.

Now, I hold that there is a material distinction between that form of ministry that constitutes the essence of the professions,—which, in the words we have just heard, “have